



University Senate TRANSMITTAL FORM

Senate Document #:	11-12-11
Title:	Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection
Presenter:	Francis Alt, Educational Affairs Committee
Date of SEC Review:	May 10, 2012
Date of Senate Review:	Fall 2012
Voting (highlight one):	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. On resolutions or recommendations one by one, or 2. In a single vote 3. To endorse entire report 4. For information only
Statement of Issue:	<p>Students at the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) register for classes each semester through Testudo, the University's online course management system. Testudo allows students to review the schedule of classes, course descriptions, final exam schedules, and academic deadlines. Students often use this information along with consultations with advisors to help them select courses. Currently, course syllabi are not available in many instances.</p> <p>In fall 2011, Kaiyi Xie, President of the Student Government Association (SGA), submitted a proposal to the University Senate regarding the student course selection process. This proposal raises concerns about the effectiveness of the current system and suggests that improvements be considered. Specifically, the proposal calls for preliminary course syllabi to be made available by the class registration process and potentially linked through Testudo.</p> <p>The Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) was charged by the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) with reviewing the proposal on September 28, 2011. The SEC asked that the Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) review the proposal and advise on whether the current procedures and timeline for posting syllabi are appropriate.</p>
Relevant Policy # & URL:	N/A

<p>Recommendation:</p>	<p>The Educational Affairs Committee recommends that undergraduate course syllabi for both forthcoming and previous semesters should be available online in a manner that is easily accessible to students.</p> <p>The Committee believes that every effort should be made to implement this recommendation as soon as possible with existing technology such as unit web pages accessible from Testudo or the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM). In addition, a concerted effort should be made over time to develop a universal model for the electronic dissemination of course syllabi.</p> <p>The Educational Affairs Committee also suggests that the Graduate Council consider whether a similar process should be implemented for graduate courses.</p>
<p>Committee Work:</p>	<p>The EAC initially reviewed the proposal, an addendum from the Student Government Association (SGA), and current faculty requirements for syllabi. They also discussed the potential benefits of making syllabi available earlier in the registration process. In addition, the Committee considered possible methods of implementation including posting past syllabi for a course.</p> <p>The EAC consulted with the bill's proposer, to discuss his specific concerns with the process. The Committee also met with Juan Uriagereka, Associate Provost of Faculty Affairs, to understand the current policies and gain insight on the impact of potential recommendations on faculty. In addition, the EAC met with representatives of the Office of Information Technology (OIT) to learn about the technical aspects of the current course selection system and gain insight into future developments, such as Quali Student. The Committee also met with a representative from the Registrar's Office, who provided insight into the current process for scheduling and adding information within Testudo.</p> <p>The EAC consulted with the Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) to get input on its work and a potential recommendation. The FAC suggested that EAC limit its review to undergraduate courses until the Graduate Council could be consulted and also consider alternate methods for implementing its recommendation.</p> <p>The EAC also conducted a thorough review of similar processes at peer institutions, other universities, and our own units. They</p>

	<p>found several examples that can be used as a model for our own University.</p> <p>The Committee met on April 23, 2012 and ultimately made an overarching recommendation regarding the availability of syllabi along with several suggestions for the timeline and implementation of that recommendation.</p>
Alternatives:	The Senate could reject the proposed recommendation and the current procedures would remain.
Risks:	If the Senate does not approve the proposed changes, it could miss an opportunity to improve the course selection process and provide a better experience for students.
Financial Implications:	Some resources will be required to create a central repository for syllabi.
Further Approvals Required:	Senate Approval, Presidential Approval

Senate Educational Affairs Committee

Senate Document 11-12-11

Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection

April 2012

BACKGROUND:

Students at the University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) register for classes each semester through Testudo, the University's online course management system. Testudo allows students to review the schedule of classes, course descriptions, final exam schedules, and academic deadlines. Students often use this information along with consultations with advisors to help them select courses. Currently, course syllabi are not available in many instances.

In fall 2011, Kaiyi Xie, President of the Student Government Association (SGA), submitted a proposal to the University Senate regarding the student course selection process. This proposal raises concerns about the effectiveness of the current system and suggests that improvements be considered. Specifically, the proposal calls for preliminary course syllabi to be made available by the class registration process and potentially linked through Testudo. It also requests that syllabi include a comprehensive list of major topics covered within the class, a rough grading breakdown, and whether +/- grading is used for the course.

CURRENT PRACTICE:

The University's Teaching Policies and Guidelines (Appendix 3) for instructors stipulate the elements that must be included in a course syllabus. It also defines the deadline to distribute course syllabi as the first day of class. Instructors are not required to provide their syllabi to students in advance of the course.

Currently, the course selection process takes place through Testudo. With the help of scheduling officers, department chairs and instructors create listings for each course and section of a course being offered each semester. These listings may include course notes that provide class information, book notes that provide information about the textbook(s) for the course, and embedded links that provide additional information about the course.

The University is currently in the process of developing a new system for course selection called Kuali Student. This new system will eventually replace Testudo. However, developers do not expect this new tool to be ready for another five years.

COMMITTEE WORK:

The Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) was charged (Appendix 1) by the Senate Executive Committee (SEC) with reviewing the “Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection” on September 28, 2011 (Appendix 2). The SEC asked that the Educational Affairs Committee (EAC) review the proposal and advise on whether the current procedures and timeline for posting syllabi are appropriate.

The EAC initially reviewed the proposal, an addendum from the Student Government Association (SGA), and current faculty requirements for syllabi. They also discussed the potential benefits of making syllabi available earlier in the registration process. In addition, the Committee considered possible methods of implementation including posting past syllabi for a course.

The Committee met with Kaiyi Xie, President of the SGA and the bill’s proposer, to discuss his specific concerns about the current process. Xie expressed that the lack of course information and syllabi create a burden for the student. He believes that course descriptions should be expanded to include the demands for a course. He also suggested ways in which the current system could be improved.

The EAC met with Juan Uriagereka, Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, to understand the current policies and gain insight on the impact and feasibility of potential recommendations. Uriagereka suggested that the committee note some best practices in its final recommendation and solicit input from the Faculty Affairs Committee. The EAC also consulted with Chris Higgins, Director of Learning Technologies & Environments, and Dan Symonds, Assistant Director of Technology Development to understand the technical aspects of the current course selection system and gain insight into future developments. The Committee learned that the Enterprise Learning Management System (ELMS) would be replaced with a new system that will allow publicly accessible information. The University is developing a new system, Quali Student, which would be available in five years. In this new system, it would be possible to attach documents to courses.

The EAC also met with Jennifer Riggs, Associate Registrar for Scheduling & Data Support. She provided insight into the process for scheduling and adding information within Testudo. The Committee learned about the role of the scheduling officer in course management and discovered that course notes could be added within Testudo with links to departmental or instructor webpages.

After a thorough review, the EAC learned that most of our peer institutions do not have a system in place for archiving past or present syllabi. However, the committee discovered that Stanford University has a good model for creating a universal syllabus repository: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/syllabus/faqs/>. The committee also

investigated the current processes of our own colleges to gain insight into existing best practices and found the Department of Psychology's website for syllabi (http://psychology.umd.edu/ugrad/Undergrad_syllabi.html) to be a good model.

The EAC consulted with the Senate's Faculty Affairs Committee (FAC) to get input on its work and a potential recommendation. The FAC advised that the committee limit their review to undergraduate courses until the Graduate Council could be consulted. In addition, the FAC recommended that EAC consider alternate methods for implementing its recommendation.

The EAC met on April 23, 2012, to consider the information collected over the course of its review and propose potential recommendations. The committee ultimately made an overarching recommendation regarding the availability of course syllabi. In addition, the EAC agreed to include several suggestions for the timeline and implementation of that recommendation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Educational Affairs Committee recommends that undergraduate course syllabi for both forthcoming and previous semesters should be available online in a manner that is easily accessible to students.

The Committee believes that every effort should be made to implement this recommendation as soon as possible with existing technology such as unit web pages accessible from Testudo or the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM). In addition, a concerted effort should be made over time to develop a universal model for the electronic dissemination of course syllabi.

The Educational Affairs Committee also suggests that the Graduate Council consider whether a similar process should be implemented for graduate courses.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Charge from the Senate Executive Committee, September, 28, 2011


Appendix 2 – Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection

Appendix 3 – Excerpt from "Teaching Policies and Guidelines: A Starting Point"

APPENDIX 1: Charge



**University Senate
CHARGE**

Date:	September 28, 2011
To:	Francis Alt Chair, Educational Affairs Committee
From:	Eric Kasischke Chair, University Senate 
Subject:	Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection
Senate Document #:	11-12-11
Deadline:	March 30, 2012

The Senate Executive Committee (SEC) requests that the Educational Affairs Committee review the attached, "Proposal to Clarify and Improve Student Class Selection," and make recommendations on whether the current procedures and timeline for posting syllabi are appropriate.

The University's teaching policies and guidelines for instructors stipulate the elements that must be included in a course syllabus and that the deadline to distribute a course syllabus is the first day of class. However, instructors are not required to provide their syllabus to students in advance of the course. The SEC requests that the Educational Affairs Committee review the proposal and advise on whether the current policies and guidelines should be revised to include earlier posting of course syllabi, possibly prior to the course registration process.

Specifically, we ask that you:

1. Consult with the proposer to discuss his specific concerns about the current process.
2. Review the current University teaching policies and guidelines for instructors.
3. Review similar policies and guidelines at our peer institutions.
4. Consult with the University's Office of Faculty Affairs to review current practices and discuss the advantages and disadvantages to possible changes.
5. If appropriate, recommend how current policies and guidelines can be changed to serve both students and instructors.

We ask that you submit your report and recommendations to the Senate Office no later than March 30, 2012. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Reka Montfort in the Senate Office, extension 5-5804.



**University Senate
PROPOSAL FORM**

Name:	Kaiyi Xie
Date:	September 16, 2011
Title of Proposal:	Proposal to clarify and improve student class selection
Phone Number:	301.367.5262
Email Address:	SGApresident@umd.edu
Campus Address:	0209J Stamp Student Union
Unit/Department/College:	ENGR, CMNS
Constituency (faculty, staff, undergraduate, graduate):	Ex-officio undergraduate
Description of issue/concern/policy in question:	<p>Students are currently unable to view class syllabi before classes begin and/or professors distributes them. Indeed, they have little to no opportunity to view the syllabi of the class of previous professors/sections. This raises many potential problems for students, which include but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choosing classes that are of an inappropriate difficulty level Unable to tailor a course plan that fits personal/professional interests and/or career goals Fulfilling gen-ed requirements with classes that do not end up meeting students' interests/goals <p>In fact, there is NO mandate on professors to distribute a clear syllabus in the <i>Policies and Procedures</i>. Only in III-5.10 (A), "Policies and Procedures Concerning Academic Assignments on Dates of Religious Observances" is it <i>suggested</i> that professors include a policy on missing assignments during religious holidays in their syllabi. In addition, advising is NOT mandated of all students (under <i>UMCP Policies and Procedures</i> III-2.50 (A)). Only certain departments mandate that students undergo semesterly advising to remove registration blocks prior to class registration. While it is clear that students with doubts about class choices can consult advisors/professors, doing so may not solve this problem for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advisors from one academic college often do not know the details of classes in other academic colleges There is no clear way to track past syllabi from past semesters for classes, especially by those taught by new professors, to

	<p>keep subject material consistent and pertinent- if there are such methods within different departments, such materials should be made fully available to students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It would be easier for students to compare classes if the syllabi were available instead of speaking to professors individually • Consulting professors will sometimes not lead to a clear and reasonable solution, and oftentimes, professors are too busy to be able to answer very specific questions from students regarding a course's subject-material <p>Undoubtedly, there is difficulty on the part of the student in asking "the right question" regarding the class to professors or advisors. Most of the time, all the information a student knows about the class is the name, section, and a brief description of the subject covered on Testudo.</p>
<p>Description of action/changes you would like to see implemented and why:</p>	<p>Policy requiring professors to include information in syllabi (including but not limited to a comprehensive list of major topics covered within the class, rough grading breakdown, whether +/- grading is used, etc.), with a hard deadline set for professors to have preliminary syllabi ready for students to be able to review, preferably at the time that class registration beings. Since the web infrastructure of Testudo is quite old, if there is a way to post such syllabi to Testudo (or perhaps uploading to the department's website then including a link to the syllabus on the class description on Testudo), that would be preferable. However, if there is not, then the syllabi should be made available to students upon demand, if the student contacts the professor/academic unit responsible for the class. Exceptions would be if a professor for a class section is not determined yet- however, an old syllabus could be made available for that class.</p>
<p>Suggestions for how your proposal could be put into practice:</p>	<p>As aforementioned, uploading onto Testudo/some other UMD website would be preferable. If not possible, then making it clear to students that they have the right to ask for a preliminary syllabus from the professor or academic unit would be very utile for students.</p>
<p>Additional Information:</p>	<p>None</p>

Please send your completed form and any supporting documents to senate-admin@umd.edu or University of Maryland Senate Office, 1100 Marie Mount Hall, College Park, MD 20742-7541. Thank you!

COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

Syllabus

Per University policy, instructors are expected to distribute a course syllabus on the first day of class. This document should contain the following information:

1. Course and section number and title.
2. Name of instructor, office phone number and address, email address; office hours.
3. General description of the course, as well as its meeting location and times.
4. Required textbooks (where used). Include ISBN numbers if available.
5. Course outline.
6. Due dates for papers/projects, as well as exam dates, including the final exam.
7. Expectations of students.
8. Reminders about academic integrity (including Honor Pledge).
9. Grading procedures.
10. Attendance policy, including:
 - a. A specification of the nature of the in-class participation expected and the effects of absences on the student's grade.
 - b. An explanation of how religious holidays, inclement weather, excused absences and make-up exams will be handled. For example syllabus language regarding expectations for medically necessary absences, visit faculty.umd.edu/teach/syllabus.html.
11. Arrangements for students with disabilities.

In addition to the required information listed above, it is strongly recommended that the syllabus include:

1. Methods for communicating with students outside the classroom regarding matters such as class cancellations, meeting times, or room changes.
2. Means by which courses will be continued/completed in case of an emergency that closes the University for an extended period of time.

3. Importance of academic integrity. Provide more detail about what constitutes dishonesty, with perhaps a concrete list of dos and don'ts in the context of the class.
4. Notice that class lectures and other materials are copyrighted and that they may not be reproduced for anything other than personal use without written permission from you.